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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this booklet is to familiarize teachers and administrators with the background of Vietnamese immigrant students in Canadian public schools. A historical and cultural overview is provided which briefly describes Vietnamese customs, attitudes, roles of family members, and religion. The need for supporting and enhancing the self esteem of Vietnamese children is emphasized, and several suggestions are given for teachers working with these children. Language differences and problems commonly encountered among Chinese-speaking Vietnamese when learning English are also discussed. Phonological interference in Mandarin and Cantonese is described in tabular form. Also provided is a list of references related to educational and social integration of Vietnamese immigrants. (GC)

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

VIETNAMESE STUDENTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to familiarize teachers and administrators with the cultural and linguistic background of Vietnamese students. Linguistic differences include phonology, intonation, syntax, and orthography. Cultural differences include social customs, gestures, religion, educational methods and societal expectations. It is hoped that this information will facilitate the integration of immigrant Vietnamese students into the schools of Manitoba. While this paper refers to one specific ethnic group, the issues involved affect the education of all other immigrant groups as well.

The reader is reminded that general descriptions of cultural groups have many limitations because of variables within the group. Any given individual within a culture represents a unique personal testimony to the values of a culture.

RATIONALE

Many people relate to immigrants in an ethnocentric manner; that is, they believe their own culture to be superior and judge other cultures by the standards of their own. When teaching immigrant students, this practice can create serious problems. It is advisable that teachers know as much as possible about the cultural background and experiences of their immigrant students. By understanding the way a child perceives the world, it will be easier for the teacher to bridge the gap to the mainstream culture of the school. In addition, by presenting a sympathetic understanding of the situation out of which the immigrant has recently come, the teacher will be able to motivate the students without stimulating negative feelings in them about their own culture.

> "... the closer we come to truly understanding another person's primary motives and dominant values (not to mention our own) the better we are able to see the consistency of his behavior and the unity of his behavior." (Hamachek 1971)

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OVERVIEW: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL

Vietnam is a small country of 128,000 square miles with a population of 40 million people. Vietnam has only two large cities, - Ho-ch-Min (Saigon) in the south and Hanoi in the north. The country is long and thin; it has a long coast line and borders with Laos, Cambodia, and China. The shape of the country has permitted easy access to it resulting in many outside influences on its political and social life. One group that has been influential for some time is the ethnic Chinese. Though some Chinese have been in Vietnam for hundreds of years, they still identify strongly with their Chinese heritage. The Chinese form a large segment of the refugee population now in Canada and Vietnam.

The supply of adequate food and nutrition is a historical problem for most of Asia. The Oriental tradition of respect for the elderly is partly based on the fact that there are few people who reach old age because of the food predicament. However, Vietnam has been able to meet its food requirements in the past. This ability to feed itself - rice, vegetables, wheat and fish are staples of the Vietnamese diet - has resulted in Vietnam's not having the same drive as the rest of Asia to produce food. Culturally, the repercussion of this is that a much slower, more tranquil pace is found in the country than one finds in the neighbouring states. Moreover, this abundance has allowed people to cooperate rather than compete.

The extended family system found in most rural villages supports the agrarian economy. One can expect grandparents and unmarried members of a family to live as a nuclear unit in one house and share financial resources. Without machinery, farms are labor intensive and all members of the family are expected to contribute to the maintenance of the fields and farm. Whenever a son marries, he and his bride live with his parents; an addition is made to the home to accommodate them. In order to preserve as much arable land as possible, these additions are kept very small. In comparison with North Americans then, the Vietnamese are used to living in close quarters and are able to function socially with much less personal space than North Americans would be able to tolerate. Under these conditions, conflict is minimized by the well-defined roles each person is taught; children are expected to be cooperative and submissive.

Religion has been a great influence on the culture and history of Vietnam. Frugality, simplicity and quietness are emphasized. North Americans with their abundance and continual activity, seem impulsive, uncultured and lacking in judgment to the Vietnamese and to other Asians (Welty, 1973).

The predominant religion of Vietnam is Mahayana Buddhism with elements of Animism, Confucianism and Taoism incorporated into it. Their religion teaches tolerance for other ideologies. Anger, greed and other passions are to be controlled. Buddhist priests have a major role in Vietnamese society organizing important social and religious functions for the people.

Animism, the belief that all objects have a soul, has persisted in the theology of the Vietnamese. Nature is considered a force to co-exist with rather than an entity to be subdued. The belief in these natural forces tends to make the Vietnamese somewhat fatalistic.

Traditionally, the male has been accorded the greatest respect in the family. Males may now receive somewhat preferential treatment but wives are consulted and their opinions respected. Marriages may still be arranged by contract in some families. Both men and women work on the rural farm so for many of the Vietnamese the concept of two working parents is not strange. Teachers can expect that both Vietnamese parents will be working in order to assure the financial security of the family.

The Vietnamese are used to warm weather with monsoon and dry seasons and may not be prepared for the severity of the Canadian winter. One might do well to check that Vietnamese children are properly clothed for the cold days.

EDUCATIONAL CONCERNS

Introduction

Though it would be most helpful to be able to describe the Vietnamese school system, information about it is scarce. Until recently, most Vietnamese children attended school. However, it seems that policies of the present government have made it difficult for the ethnic Chinese to attend and many children have lost school time because of the time they have spent in refugee camps or in fleeing the country. However, once settled in Canada, the children quickly become attuned to their new school situations.

Vietnamese schools apparently emphasize the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. It will be necessary of course, to fill in gaps of knowledge about the history and geography of Canada.

Only very general information is available about the teaching styles employed by Vietnamese teachers. It would seem that role learning is heavily emphasized and accomplished through repetition. Books and blackboards are the main teaching devices and much oral work is done.

The Self-Concept of the Immigrant Student

The need to consider the self-concept of the immigrant student cannot be over emphasized.

The child will be laboring under the strain of "cultural shock," and will be living in a world that is not fully comprehensible or predictable. Not only will many of the other children already know the rules and customs of the school, but they will be mostly fair-skinned. The racial and language differences may lead the child to question why he or she is different. If the difference is further related to feelings of not being accepted or of failure, the child may reject the present situation; this rejection may be expressed as anger towards the parents or school. Some early cultural support can reduce the effect of these feelings.

The feelings of loneliness and frustration may be more difficult to deal with because Asian students as a rule are very quiet and submissive. The Mennonite Central Committee, in their pamphlet for sponsors, points out that the Vietnamese value social harmony highly, they will avoid confrontation, and questions and they find it difficult to say "no."

Support for the child can be given several ways: in the classroom, travel posters, photography and books depicting scenes of life in Vietnam can be displayed and samples of foods can be prepared and eaten so that the child recognizes something that is familiar; in classes where English is being taught to a group of Vietnamese, a bilingual volunteer, or aide working with teacher and students would be an asset.

It is especially important to allow children to speak to their ethnic peers in their own language in informal or helping situations. Facing the rigors of learning a new language is a tiring process and children need to relax into what is natural, familiar, and easiest.

The Vietnamese Student

Teachers and administrators who have already dealt with Vietnamese students are very positive about the ability of the students to adapt and do well in the Canadian school setting.

As a group, Vietnamese children are described as being anxious to learn, quick learners, industrious and very adaptable. Despite their past hardships and traumas, the children are calm and do not exhibit any readily observeable psychological maladjustment. They are obedient, providing that they understand the instructions given to them.

Students who have learned to read in their native tongue transfer the concept of reading to the new language. It also seems that perceptual or language development problems that occurred while learning in Vietnam will also occur in the Canadian school.

The cultural factors mentioned previously need to be reiterated here: the children may not initially sense the urgency of time and speed that is characteristic of the general North American culture, and may, in addition, be very reticent and shy. The teacher needs to express warmth and support to encourage the students to become involved in building new social relationships and experiences that are necessary for language learning.

Given a good English base and the opportunity to continue building language skills and developing concepts, Vietnamese students will soon catch up to their classmates in terms of academic achievement. Teachers are encouraged to assign homework as this is considered an acceptable part of a student's workload.

Language Differences

If adequate English language learning is to occur in the shortest time possible, teachers must be aware of the critical language differences both in oral and written form. The learning of English is very difficult for Asian students. Without realizing the magnitude of these differences, the teacher might expect too much too soon and frustrate the student by being too demanding.

The language background of the Vietnamese will vary. Almost all will speak Vietnamese and approximately eighty percent will speak the Chinese dialect of Cantonese. Some of the ethnic Chinese will have also been taught in Chinese.

Oral Language

Learning to hear and produce the sound of the English language, is extremely difficult for most Asians. There are several English contractions and sounds that do not occur in Chinese and therefore are not familiar to the Chinese ear and are hard to detect in order to model. A summary of phonological interferences as identified by Podoliak in Teaching Pronunciation to Chinese Learners of English as a Second Language is found on pages 12 & 13 of this paper.

It is difficult for students to produce sounds that they do not hear clearly or that they do not know how to produce. A common problem, warns Podoliak, is that the tongue is rolled up and towards the back in much of Chinese speech. In English, more back and forth movements of the tongue are used. This problem is singled out because it illustrates a cultural factor that affects language learning. Sticking out the tongue is considered extremely rude in some Oriental cultures and Asian students may find it embarrassing to have to do this in making some English sounds.

The stress and intonation of English are also different from Chinese. English sounds more staccato like than Chinese which is more rhythmic. Further, Chinese uses much more intonation to express meaning than English does.

The very task of constructing a sentence involves applying new rules for sounding the words, ordering the words, and using the appropriate tone. This learning can only proceed slowly and through approximations to the correct model.

Written Language

Some of the differences between written Chinese and written English are well known: Chinese is read from top to bottom and from right to left; Chinese is an ideographic language and not alphabetical.

Because Chinese does not have the same type of subject-predicate construction as English, the child must learn a new system of ordering words.

Chan strongly recommends that

> "It is important that the school provide both the best learning environment (immersion) and the most effective language instruction so that the child can integrate successfully in the regular school system in the shortest time possible." (Chan, 1977)

Learning Style

Play, recess time, and non-academic subjects do not form a large part of the curriculum of Asian schools. At first, some Vietnamese students have difficulty realizing that they are expected to go out and play at recess time.

The Chinese student will look to the teacher for direction, but is not likely to ask for it if it is not forthcoming. It is important for teachers to check on the progress of these students in order to supply the help they might not otherwise request.

To develop the types of programs needed for improving reading and writing skills, teachers are referred to materials used in teaching English as a second language. It is beyond the scope of this paper to recommend particular ESL approaches.

Communication With The Home

Whenever possible it is suggested that a good translator be provided by either the school or the family. Parents, like their children, are completely unfamiliar with the intentions and procedures of the school. A thorough explanation and tour of the school can save a lot of misunderstanding at a later date. Many of the details of school procedure could be discussed such as recess, inservice days, gym wear, etc.

If experiences with other immigrant Asian parents are any indication, one can expect little communication from the home. Parents assume that the school will do its job of teaching and disciplining children. Vietnamese parents do not use corporal punishment and are generally permissive.

SUMMARY

The personal tragedies of the immigrant Vietnamese are already common knowledge. The difficulties involved in acculturation and language learning have been identified. The teachers of these children will need patience and understanding to guide them through the difficult period of language learning and cultural integration. The high motivation of these children is certainly a positive factor but teachers must realize that language learning takes place best in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere.

It is essential that the immigrant student be accepted by other children at school and by the community as a whole. The often discriminatory and racist treatment of Orientals by the Canadian government and the general population has been documented in at least one publication (Lore, 1974). Teachers need to deal actively with the issues of prejudice and discrimination by using multicultural teaching techniques. Such approaches will become increasingly necessary as Canada receives more immigrants from non-Western nations.

This handbook was compiled to provide teachers with some information and insight into the culture and educational background of the Vietnamese. As time progresses, it is hoped that more information will be available to help ease the integration of Vietnamese students into the mainstream of Canadian society.

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SUMMARY OF PHONOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE

MANDARIN	CANTONESE
No consonant clusters Vowels are added to the English cluster. "skr" becomes "Sekera". Or consonants are dropped.	No consonant clusters
The only final consants are /n, ŋ, r/. In English "cup" becomes /kʌpə/ or /kʌ/.	The only final consonants are /m,n,ŋ,p,t,k,r/. and glottal stops.
	Final/t,k/ are confused by speakers of some dialects.
No voiced stops or affricates All become voiceless.	No voiced stops or affricates. in some dialects.
No /v/. Substituted by /f/ or /w/. Exception: In some dialects /v/ and /w/ are allophones.	No /v/. Substituted by /f/ or /w/.
/r/ is retroflex, palatal, fricative. Sounds like English /ž/. Confused with /l/.	No /r/. Usually substituted by /l/, sometimes by /d/.
/r, l, n/ are sometimes confused.	/r, l, n/ are sometimes confused.
/l, n/ are allophones in Western Mandarin.	/l, n/ are allophones in some forms of Cantonese.
/l/ shortened, sounds like our /d/	
/s/ and /š/ are confused by speakers of some dialects.	
No "th" /θ/ or /ð/. /s/ or /f/ is substituted for /θ/ /d/ for /ð/.	No "th", /θ/ or /ð/. /s/ or /f/ is substituted for /θ/ /d/ for /ð/.
/h/ is fricative	
/y/ might be added before front vowels. It's not a phoneme. English "ear" and "year" confused:	

MANDARIN	CANTONESE
/ŋ/ might be added before back vowels. It's only a phoneme in final position.	
/i/ and /I/ are allophones Confusion between /i/ and /I/ in English.	Shorter version of /i/, but no /I/. Confusion between /i/ and /I/ in English.
/u/ but no /ʊ/. Confusion between them in English.	/u/ but no /ʊ/. Confusion between them in English.
No /æ/ or /o/.	No /æ/ or /o/.
	No /ə/ or /ɚ/
	Somewhat new /a/
* The vowel system is different.	The vowel system is different.
Tone Language * English Stress and Intonation is new.	Tone Language English Stress and Intonation is new.

The following materials are available in multiple copies from the ESL Resource Centre, Department of Education, 1181 Portage Avenue.

Papers on the Chinese Community. Toronto: Ministry of Culture and Recreation, Multicultural Development Branch, 1975.

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Directory of English Language Classes for Newcomers. Winnipeg: Curriculum Services, Department of Education, January, 1980.

English Pronunciation Exercises for Speakers of Vietnamese #7. Virginia: National Indo-Chinese Clearinghouse, Centre for Applied Linguistics.

Education in Vietnam: Fundamental Principles and Curricula. Virginia: National Indo-Chinese Clearinghouse, Centre for Applied Linguistics.

An Introduction to Various Ethnic Groups From Laos. New York: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

Laos: The Land and the People. New York: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

Single copies of the following material are available for inspection from Abe Peters, ESL Consultant, 404-1181 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg. Telephone 786-0288.

A Handbook for Teachers of Vietnamese Students: Hints for Dealing with Cultural Differences in Schools. Cost: $2.00 Highly recommended.

English-Vietnamese Phrase Book with Useful Word List (for Vietnamese speakers). Cost: $4.00 2 cassette tapes $13.00

Vietnamese-English Phrase Book with Useful Word List (for English speakers). Cost: $3.00 1 cassette tape $6.00

The above may be ordered from:

Centre for Applied Linguistics
1611 North Kent Street
Arlington, Virginia 22209

Birth Control Information in Vietnamese, Chinese, and English. Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Health and Community Services.

A Guide to Winnipeg for New Immigrants. Winnipeg: Chinese Community Council of Manitoba.

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

700 Elgin Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Telephone: 772-0346

Centre for language training and services to immigrants.

Many schools make use of the Centre's translation and interpreter service.